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ABSTRACT

This study examined issues faced during implementation of school-based management (SBM) in New Jersey's special needs or Abbott districts, using a literature review, surveys of K-12 schools, and focus groups with central office administrators. The study examined forms of SBM, team operations, local autonomy versus state power, skills required to ensure legitimate participation, and administrators' understanding of the decentralization process. New Jersey created a model that most closely approximated a balanced control form of SBM. Teams believed that their membership was committed and that individual interests did not supersede team goals. Conflict among members did not hinder their ability to operate effectively. About one-third were unclear about their roles and responsibilities. The School Review and Improvement (SRI) team played an extensive regulatory role in decentralization. Teams reported high levels of dissatisfaction with SRI support. Very few teams included members who had prior involvement in the areas for which they were responsible. Districts were not adverse to the devolving of authority to local sites and endorsed the process, though they cited several problem areas. Eight policy considerations are listed (e.g., the need to establish a formal collaborative agreement between the State Department of Education and all major players). (Contains 30 references.) (SM)

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Implementing School-Based Management in the Abbott Districts

Elaine M. Walker

Research Brief Volume 1, No. 1, December 2000

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Research Brief

Volume 1: No. 1, December 2000

Center for Urban Leadership, Renewal and Research

Department of Educational Administration and Supervision: Seton Hall University

Decentralization and participatory decision-making: Implementing school-based management in the Abbott Districts

Elaine M. Walker- Associate Professor

INTRODUCTION

Democratization of the decision-making process in public schools has become one of the major centerpieces in public school education reform. Since the sixties, attempts have been made to increase the level of participation in decision- making through the formal incorporation of various subgroups. Concerned with such issues as granting greater power and authority to local communities as well as diffusing state authority and increasing organizational efficiency, the decentralization movements of the sixties and seventies saw the devolution of authority as an end to meet political and administrative goals(Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1996; David, 1989). However the eighties witnessed a change in the purposive intent of advocates of decentralization. The focus of school based management from this period until today has been driven by the need to improve student achievement, and to bring about 'comprehensive educational changes'- changes that address professional development and instruction, decentralization of structures for broader participation and decision-making, and the replacement of bureaucratic regulation with professional responsibility and accountability (David, 1989).

The growing popularity of school-based management as a reform strategy is evidenced by the fact that in 1993, over 44 states practiced some form of school- based management, although only two states Kentucky and Texas had mandated statewide decentralization policies at that time (Herman & Herman, 1993). Increasing democratization of the decision- making process in schools has also gained international appeal in the reform movements in countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Britain, Spain and Wales (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). However, at the same time that more and more school districts, states and nations are adopting decentralization policies in the hope of bringing about improvement in student achievement, the evidence is suggesting that school based management may be less powerful a source of school improvement than its advocates would believe. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the impact of school-based management is more apparent in the areas of governance and organizational structures than in changed classroom practices and improved student achievement (Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1996; Summers & Johnson, 1991).

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New Jersey School-Based Management Model

In 1998, in its culminating decision on the legal challenges to the State of New Jersey's funding and educational policies with respect to the state's poorest districts, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered the implementation of a series of remedial measures aimed at redressing the long standing disparities between poor and affluent school districts. The decision referred to as Abbott V sets out an ambitious agenda for reform that includes changes in instructional programming through the adoption of whole school reform models, expansion of early childhood programming and school-community social agency linkages as well as improvement in facilities.

According to regulations published by the New Jersey Department of Education, the process of implementing the reforms ordered by the State's Supreme Court is to be guided and led by teachers, parents, community and other school level staff through the formal establishment of school management teams. The regulation states that the purpose of these teams is to " ensure participation of staff, parents and the community in school level decision making and to develop a culture of cooperation, accountability and commitment" (New Jersey Department of Education, 2000). To that end, the school management teams are expected to guide and lead decisions in ten critical areas (two of which they exercise their right to act on through a voting process).

Levacic (1995) has developed a framework for describing the constituent elements of a school-based management model which is helpful in guiding our understanding of the key features of SBM in the Abbott Districts. Levacic's framework focuses on three essential elements of SBM: "1) the stakeholders to whom decision-making power and responsibility are decentralized, (2) the management domains over which decentralized power can be exercised and (3) the form of regulations that controls what the local decision makers have discretion over and how they are held accountable for their decisions and actions" (Karsten & Meijer, 1999:422).

Stakeholders-Structure and Composition of the SMTs

The guidelines state that the constituent groups that must be represented on the school management teams are the building principals, teachers, school-level support staff, parents and community. The inclusion of students is an optional requirement that is left to the discretion of the individual school. Groups or individuals excluded from membership on a team are board of education members or district employees who wish to serve in the capacity of a parent or community representative. According to the regulations, no one group can constitute 50 percent or more of a team's total membership. Membership on a team is secured either through an electoral process or by selection. The minimum number of years that a given member can serve is two, however to ensure that there is continuity in the event of an election or selection teams are allowed to stagger membership.

Management Domains: The Roles and Responsibilities of The SMT

The primary responsibility of the teams is to develop a plan that will guide the school's implementation of its whole school reform model. The teams are also responsible for ensuring that their schools' curriculum and instruction are aligned to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. They are expected to engage in a needs assessment process based on a review of student performance data on the statewide assessments and on the basis of this review make recommendations for curricular and instructional improvement.

Teams are also required to ensure that there is a program of professional development for teachers in their individual schools linked to the school's whole school reform model. Each team is further responsible for the development of a technology plan that is submitted to the Department of Education for approval. In addition to these responsibilities, the teams are also expected to ensure that there are programs and activities that are linked to the cross content readiness standards in the core curriculum standards and to develop a school based reward system to reward those teachers, administrators and parents who contribute to students successfully meeting these standards.

Finally, the teams based on a majority vote and with state department approval (through the School Review and Improvement Team) can be responsible for approving a school budget and may recommend the appointment of a building principal, teaching staff member and instructional aides.

Accountability Under the New Jersey Model

The guidelines governing the operation of school-based management in the districts frame accountability specifically within the context of students demonstrating mastery of the core content standards. Thus, teams are expected to create systems that will reward various individuals such as administrators, teachers, and parents for successfully contributing to the attainment of the standards. More indirectly, with respect to individual members on the school-based management team, the guidelines note that members can be removed if they fail to participate in training activities or commit acts governed by N.J.A.C. 6A: 24-2.3(d). The removal of any member for reasons other than those covered in the referenced statute is contingent upon the approval of the SRI team. One may also infer that the establishment of the School Review and Improvement Team serves among other purposes to hold the districts and teams accountable for the implementation of the reforms.

The School Review and Improvement Team

The New Jersey Department of Education has created a structure, the School Review and Improvement Team, which ostensibly functions in the capacity of an overseer of the process, ensuring that the implementation of SBM is progressing according to the guidelines set forth in the regulations. The School Review and Improvement Team is comprised of Department of Education personnel from the Divisions of Student Services and Finance. Each school in an Abbott district is assigned to a team that is based at one of the State's Program Improvement and Regional Centers.

The SRI Teams have a wide range of responsibilities to include working with the districts and building principals to ensure the effective implementation of whole school reform and school-based management; consulting with the school management teams to ensure that all of the SMT responsibilities are effectively fulfilled; serving as liaisons between the schools and the Whole School Reform model developers, and consulting with the Superintendents on the transfer or removal of teachers and principals.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research brief is to conjoin with prior research on school- based management current issues faced by the Abbott schools as they move towards decentralization. This brief therefore serves two related sub- purposes; one, to identify those factors that may impact on implementation and the subsequent abilities of the SMTs to fulfill their responsibilities as outlined above, and second, to proffer recommendations that may be helpful in ensuring success-

ful devolution of decision-making to the local sites.

To that end, the study employed a mixed method research design. First a comprehensive literature review was done. This literature review served as a backdrop against which the findings from the Abbott districts were framed. Second, a mailed survey was administered to a random sample of 140 schools drawn from all elementary and middle schools in the Abbott districts. The survey elicited a response rate of 51%. Of the seventy-two teams responding, 15 were cohort 1 schools, 14 cohort 2, 6 mid-year cohort and 32 cohort 3 schools. There were approximately 5 teams that failed to identify their cohort status. (Cohort status refers to the time at which schools elected to start the reform process. Cohort 1 schools were the first set of schools that began the process the first year after the Abbott rulings).

Finally, a focus group was held with central office representatives from six school districts selected on the basis of geographical variations. Augmenting the findings from the focus group was information yielded from the discussions that were held with three superintendents.

Initially when the project was conceived there was a desire to have the literature review guided by the ten areas of responsibilities outlined in the NJDOE regulations. However, we found that there was a paucity of studies specifically addressing these areas. Therefore, it was difficult to develop any robust conclusions with respect to the factors likely to impact on the teams' abilities to successfully carry out each of the ten tasks for which they were responsible. In approaching and reporting on the literature review we selectively focused on those areas that we considered to be most salient to enhancing the understanding of SBM in the state, both with respect to the original formulations in the regulations and to the subsequent manner in which SBM is evolving as we moved from regulation to implementation. In presenting the findings an attempt was made where feasible to interweave the results from the empirical study of the Abbott teams with those from the literature.

Forms of School-Based Management: Where does the New Jersey Model Fit?

Murphy and Beck (1995) suggest that school based management typically assumes one of three ideal forms; administrative control SBM (in this model the principal is the primary decision maker), professional control (teachers are the primary decision makers) and community/parent control (community members and parents are the major decision making groups). A fourth though less popular form is defined by Malen and Ogawa (1988) as balanced control. In this model an attempt is made to establish a balance in decision-making among all stakeholders.

Examples of the first three models in their ideal or hybrid forms can be found throughout the literature. Texas is one example of a state in which school- based management is premised on retaining the authority of the principal. Miami and Los Angeles as well as Kentucky have adopted models in which teachers are the primary decision makers, although in the Kentucky model the principal is usually the chair of the school-based decision making council. Chicago is perhaps the most well known and written about form of community/parent control. In Chicago, the 1989 School Improvement Act called for the creation of local school councils in which the repository of power and authority resided with parents and community members who were given the responsibilities to: 1) develop a school plan, 2) distribute resources and 3) hire and remove school principals.
School- based management forms that purport to have a balance in the distribution of power have been

identified in Salt Lake (Malen and Ogawa, 1988) and Spain (Hanson & Ulrich, 1994). Irrespective of these distinct models, the research has indicated that there is a tendency for most forms of SBM to regress towards administrative control.

Within the context of New Jersey, it is clear from the regulations that the DOE attempted to create a model that most closely approximated a balanced control form of SBM. In the New Jersey model, no one group of stakeholders can constitute 50 percent or more of the total membership. In actuality however, the findings from the present study indicate that SBM in New Jersey is regressing towards a teacher-dominated form of SBM based on the data reported by the teams.

Of the sixty-nine teams with valid responses on membership composition there were 15 teams in which the teaching staff members represented more than 50% of the total membership and 13 teams on which teachers made up half or 50% of the total membership. There were two additional teams in which the teaching staff appeared to constitute more than 50%. However, the number reported for total membership on these teams was fairly large and we conjectured that the teams were reporting on some of the structures that are required by some of the whole school reform models. The dominance in terms of membership by teachers on the school management teams cut across all cohorts, however, proportionately more of cohort 1 teams were likely to be teacher dominated than cohort 2, mid-year cohort or cohort 3 teams.

With respect to representation from other constituents, while more than 90 percent of the teams reported having at least one parent member, about 26 or approximately 38% of the teams were without community representation at the time of the study. The twenty-six teams reporting no community presence were proportionately distributed among the various cohorts, although slightly more 43% or 6 out of the 14-second year cohort teams in the study indicated that they had no community representation. On the other hand, only 7 teams had no school-support staff representation. The data provided by the teams in the study revealed that most teams lacked student representation. Indeed 58 teams or roughly 83% reported that there was no student membership. It should be pointed out however, that this study surveyed only elementary and middle schools, and that the level of maturity and potential contribution that younger-aged students can make in critical decision-making situations may be one factor that could explain the low level of student involvement on the SMTs. Additionally, the regulations state that the incorporation of student presence on the SMT is optional.

Team Operations: Factors Influencing the Capacity to Effectively Govern

The teams were asked to rate their ability to function effectively along several operational dimensions that have been previously identified in the literature as important influences on a team's capacity to effectively govern. These dimensions included clarity about roles and responsibilities, membership commitment, understanding of a shared mission, meeting schedules and attendance at meetings, effectiveness in communicating with the larger school community, and active as opposed to token participation in decision - making.

Generally, the teams exhibited ambivalence in their evaluation of their ability to effectively operate. Teams were unanimous that their membership was committed (86%) and that individual interests did not supersede the goals and mission of their work (88%). Teams reported that conflict among members did not pose a barrier to their ability

to operate effectively (91%). Indeed, ninety percent of the teams reported that they were able to deal constructively with differences in opinions among themselves when these differences arose. It would therefore appear from these findings that on some of the key elements of team operations, specifically the ability of teams to form an internal cohesive decision-making body, that most of the teams have been successful.

On the other hand, about one-third of the teams (31%) indicated that they were unclear as to their roles and responsibilities. About the same percentage (33%) also reported difficulties in communicating with their larger school communities. Securing adequate involvement from all potential constituent groups was raised as another problem area affecting team operations. On this issue, the experiences of the larger school districts are worth mentioning.

According to these districts, the guidelines in the regulations which preclude in-district employees from serving in the capacity of parent or community representative have hampered their ability to recruit membership from these groups since many local residents have an employment status with the school system. In addition to this issue, teams also reported problems with scheduling meetings as well as attendance at meetings.

The regulations governing the functioning of the SMTs state that they must establish subcommittees or work groups. These work groups are to be composed of both SMT and non-SMT members and are to be constituted on an as needed basis. The purpose of the subcommittees is to assist the SMTs in addressing the various areas of responsibilities that fall under their purview. The data in this study indicate that while most teams rely upon these work groups, about 30% of the teams do not. Further, about 36% or slightly more than a third of the teams noted that the ineffectiveness of these work groups had become a problem. The importance of subcommittee work cannot be underscored more strongly, given the difficulties that teams reported with scheduling as well as attendance at meetings. In fact, the experiences in Chicago suggest that the effectiveness of subcommittee structures can be used as a basic viability test of the capacity of teams to undertake their mandated responsibilities (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1997).

Finally, about 40% of the Teams reported that monetary compensation for team members has become an issue. The guidelines for compensating team members state that members cannot be compensated except when (i) a collective bargaining exists which provides for compensation for hours beyond the school day, and (ii) reasonable expenses have been incurred by a member. However, there appear to be situations in which members were expecting to be compensated and questions regarding the differential compensation of some members versus others (for example parent versus teachers) have become thorny. This appears to be an important issue as it also emerged as a topic during the focus group discussion with central office personnel.

Local Autonomy vs. State Power: SBM Teams' Evaluation of the School Review and Improvement Teams

There are two related issues that one may surface regarding the balance in power between the State and the local sites in the reform process. First, according to David (1989), a policy cornerstone of successful decentralization involves the accompanying of local autonomy with simultaneous relief from onerous

TABLE 1

Percent of Teams Reporting Satisfaction with their School Review and Improvement Teams in Key Areas of Support

Area of Support	Percent Reporting Satisfaction
Assistance with implementation	56%
Review of the school's budget	50%
Support with resolving problems	42%
Assistance with implementation plan	41%
Assistance with the development of the school's budget	39%
Technical Assistance	36%
Attendance at meetings	29%
Support with the Model Developers	26%
Identifying for the schools, experts who can help with student achievement	18%
Identifying areas for training	15%
Overall Satisfaction with the SRI Teams	38%

rules and regulations (See also Herman & Herman, 1992). Several states including Texas have opted to accompany mandates for SBM with waivers and have provided districts with relief from regulatory requirements. Hill and Bonan's (1991) study of New American Schools underscore the importance of not reopening doors to regulations as schools move towards participatory decision-making.

The extensive regulatory role played by the School Review and Improvement Team in the decentralization process in New Jersey seems to stand in contradistinction to David's observation. In fact, the question can be posed as to whether or not the regulations governing the role of the SRI teams have the potential to undermine local autonomy and thereby result in an intensification of power at the state level, rather than a real gain of power at the school level. The strong regulatory presence of the Department of Education through the School Review and Improvement Teams far exceeds and is different from the decentralization and centralization tendencies that many state reform strategies have exhibited (Levin, 1997; Levacic, 1995; Boyd, 1992).

These strategies evident in other reform efforts elsewhere in the country, have combined shifts in authority to local schools with state control over setting and monitoring standards. However, the School Review and Improvement Teams' roles extend beyond one that is primarily of a monitoring nature. The SRI among other responsibilities approves decisions made by

the local schools, decides when a team can assume new responsibilities in the areas of budgeting personnel (if teams decide by a majority vote to assume these responsibilities) and consults with the CSA in the transfer or firing of principals and teachers. In effect they have assumed an external governance role thereby adding another bureaucratic layer to the reform.

Counter positions on the purpose of SBM have been adopted by some scholars. According to these writers the rhetoric of local autonomy actually veils what in reality are some of the latent purposes of SBM. School-based management besides the explicit goal of improving schools is seen as serving a less recognized function, that of granting legitimacy to state departments of education (Ball, 1993). Thus, States in wanting to appear sensitive to local needs may push for decentralization.

However, through this policy they are able to distance themselves from the problems created by poor policies and the subsequent contradictions that these policies create. Thus when reforms fail, states are able to blame schools for poor management. According to Ball (1993), under these circumstances states are left in the unenviable position of having power without accountability.

One may argue that the organizational structures which the New Jersey Department of Education has put in place to provide field-based assistance to the schools and their respective management teams does place the Department of Education in a position of shared responsibility for ensuring the success of the reforms. Thus, the NJDOE may not be able to politically distance itself from failed policies with respect to these districts.

This notion of shared responsibility implies that both parties, state and local districts and schools are equally contributing to the successful implementation of the reforms. Since the SRI is the primary state resource that is being directed to support the schools, the question as to how effective this field assistance has been is relevant to raise. The School Management Teams in the study were asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction with the support provided by the SRI teams in the areas stipulated by the regulations. The following discussion presents the Teams responses.

At the time of the survey more than one third of the teams had not yet had a meeting with their SRI facilitator. Further, several of the teams were unfamiliar with the roles and responsibilities of the SRI and sought clarification from the researchers. Thus only about 41 out of the 72 teams were able to provide feedback on the SRI teams. Among the districts providing feedback, there was a high level of dissatisfaction with the support that the SRI teams have provided. Seventy-one percent of the teams reported that their SRI facilitator attended meetings irregularly, and 56% noted that the technical assistance provided was unsatisfactory.

While, about 56% of the teams stated that their SRI did provide them with help around general implementation issues, 54% noted that the SRI teams provided no assistance with the actual development of their implementation plans. Furthermore, more that 58% of the teams were dissatisfied with the help their SRI Team gave around problems encountered as they move towards compliance with the reform goals and an even larger percent 68% indicated that their SRI team provided minimal assistance in working with the model developers. An equally substantial number of the teams (25 or 68%) noted that their SRI did not help in identifying areas for training, neither were the SRI facilitators helpful in assisting the teams in the identification of experts that can help with the problem of student achievement.

With respect to the budgeting process, more than 61% of the school management teams reported that they were dissatisfied (or unsure of how satisfied they were) with the assistance, which their SRI facilitator provided in the development of the school budgets. However, the teams were equally split on whether or not they were satisfied with their SRI review of their budget. Overall, only about 38% of the teams reported general satisfaction with the support that they received from the SRI Team that has been assigned to them.

Significant differences existed among the cohorts with respect to their evaluation of the SRI teams. Generally, schools belonging to the first cohort were more dissatisfied with the support which they received from their SRI facilitators than any of the other cohorts. First cohort schools dissatisfaction cut across most of the levels of support that were evaluated in the survey, but was most pronounced in the areas of implementation, quality of technical assistance provided and attendance at meetings.

Information provided during the focus group session suggests that two factors are contributing to the ineffectiveness of the SRI teams. The first, relates to the instability of team membership. All of the districts in the focus group concurred that during the early phases of the reform there was little stability to SRI team membership. However, two districts noted that they have since been assigned new SRI facilitators who have been extremely supportive of their implementation efforts. Nevertheless, it was pointed out in the discussion, that problems with the SRI teams assigned to the northern PIRC region continue to exist.

A second contributing factor identified by the districts is the knowledge base and experiences brought by the SRI facilitators. There was general agreement that the SRI facilitators lack the experiences and knowledge base around the change process in general and reform within the urban context in particular. SRI team facilitators were described as being inexperienced and who for the most part seemed to be learning from the districts and schools rather than the other way around. These findings on the relative ineffectiveness of the SRI are not new. An earlier study on factors impacting on the implementation of the reforms pointed to problems with the SRI teams and had suggested that the State Department of Education needed to closely evaluate the way in which these teams are functioning (Walker & Gutmore, 2000). The overall impact of the SRI teams' ineffectiveness is evident in the fact that slightly more that 48% of the school based management teams noted that the absence of technical support has posed a challenge to their ability to function..

Skills Required to Ensure Legitimate Participation: How much Knowledge do SMT Members Possess in the Areas for which they have Direct Responsibility?

Lawler (1986) argues that legitimate participation has four requirements: knowledge and skills, power, information and rewards. This framework has been used by Wohlestetter et.al (1994) to explain variations in implementation and effects among SMTs operating in different contexts. In surveying the teams in the Abbott districts we focused directly on three of these requirements: knowledge, skills and information. Teams were asked to rate on several scales their level of knowledge, previous experience and comfort in the ten areas of responsibilities.

It is reasonable to expect that the experiences that members on the school management teams bring to their new roles are likely to impact qualitatively on the kinds of decisions that they make as teams and their comfort in doing so. Data on the number of team members who have had prior experiences in the 10 areas for which the teams

have responsibilities indicate that overall very few teams are composed of members who have had prior involvement in the varied areas for which they are now expected to assume responsibility (See Table 2).

As can be seen in Table 2, experience is weakest in the areas of school-based budgeting, technology planning, school-based hiring decisions and developing reward systems. Teams had proportionately more members, who prior to joining the Teams had some experience in the areas of curriculum alignment and needs assessment.

TABLE 2

PERCENT OF SMT MEMBERS WITH PRIOR EXPERIENCE IN EACH AREA OF TEAMS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Areas of Responsibility	Percent of Members with Prior Experience
Conducting Needs Assessment	42.3%
Aligning Curriculum	41.7%
Working on, or reviewing professional development programs	37.4%
Involved in developing school-based reward systems	30.0%
Involved in school-based hiring decisions	19.9%
Worked on developing a technology plan	16.8%
Involved in school-based budgeting (zero-based) budgeting decisions	9.8%

It is quite conceivable, that although team members may lack the experience base for making some of the decisions that they are expected to, that nevertheless, they may have an informed knowledge base that can be drawn upon in decision-making situations. Each team was asked to indicate the degree of knowledge it possessed as an entity in each of the 10 areas of responsibility. Their responses are summarized in Table 3.

About one third of the teams felt that they had a substantive knowledge base on how to align curriculum, review test score data, determine program and curricular needs on the basis of this review, and determine actions needed to improve academic achievement in their schools. On the other hand, a significant proportion (over 75%) felt that they had only some or no knowledge on how to 1) develop a professional development program that is related to the implementation of the reform, (2) develop a technology plan, 3) make decisions with regard to hiring school personnel, 4) develop a school-based budget and 5) develop school based reward systems.

Significant differences were found among the cohorts. Teams belonging to the first cohort were more likely to report lack of knowledge with respect to developing school-based budgets than teams belonging to the second, mid-year and third year cohorts. Third-year cohort teams were also more likely to report having less knowledge on creating professional development

programs than the second year cohorts.

Training is a critical component in the development of the knowledge and capacity of Teams to function effectively in making quality decisions. To that end, teams were asked to rate the adequacy of training received around the major substantive areas for which they have responsibilities. Overall, the teams were more favorable in their ratings of the training received in areas related to curriculum, test score analysis and professional development, than they were in their ratings of the training provided around technology, school-based budgeting, hiring decisions and developing school-based reward systems (Refer to Table 4). Teams belonging to first year cohort schools were apt to be more negative in their evaluation of training supports than teams belonging to the other cohorts. At least one third of the teams reported not receiving training in most of the areas with the exception of school-based budgeting and the roles and responsibilities of the teams (See Table 5).

TABLE 3

AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITIES: PERCENT OF TEAMS REPORTING MINIMAL KNOWLEDGE

Areas of SMT Responsibility	Percent of Teams Reporting Minimal Knowledge
Aligning Instruction to the Core Content Standards	55.4%
Deciding what actions needed to be taken on the basis of test score data	59.1%
Reviewing test score data as part of a needs assessment process	62.1%
Determining program needs on the basis of test score reviews	66.7%
Making curricular decisions on the basis of test score data	66.7%
Developing school-based reward systems	75.8%
Developing a professional development program that is linked to the implementation of the reforms	79.4%
Making school-based personnel decisions with respect to hiring	80.3%
Developing a technology plan	80,6%
Developing a school-based budget based on zero-based budgeting procedures	82.1%

Given the fact that teams lack the knowledge and experience to adequately fulfill their responsibilities, and given the unevenness in their satisfaction with the training that they have received, how comfortable are the teams in making the decisions that are expected of them? Data provided by the teams in the survey indicate that the teams feel more comfortable in making decisions related to curricular and instructional issues than they do in making decisions that involve technology, school-based budgets, school hiring decisions and reward structures. For example, more than sixty percent of the teams reported that they are uncomfortable in creating rewards for teachers, and more than 80% indicate

TABLE 4

Rating of Training by Teams as at Least Adequate

Area of Training Support	Percent of Teams Rating Training to be at Least Adequate
Roles and responsibilities of the teams	59.0%
Developing acceptable standards for professional development	56.8%
Curriculum Alignment	53.2%
Use of test scores for decision-making	51.1%
Analysis of test scores	50.0%
Technology planning	38.9%
Developing school-based reward systems	28.6%
Hiring procedures for school-based personnel	24.5%
Developing school-based budgets	21.1%

TABLE 5

NUMBER OF TEAMS REPORTING NO TRAINING BY AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY

Area in Which Training has not Occurred	Percent of Teams Reporting No Training
Developing school-based reward systems	38.6%
Developing acceptable standards for professional development	35.7%
Hiring procedures for school-based personnel	34.3%
Curriculum alignment	32.9%
Technology planning	32.9%
Use of test scores for decision-making	32.9%
Analysis of test scores	31.4%
Developing school-based budgets	24.3%
Roles and responsibilities of the teams	12.9%

that they would be similarly uncomfortable in determining rewards for their building administrators. Forty-percent of the teams indicated that they would not be comfortable in making decisions involving the hiring of a principal and a

similar percent 44% expressed discomfort in making teaching appointments.

In some of these decisions making areas teams are required to vote on whether or not they wished to have input. At the time of the survey, only 21% of the teams had voted to provide input into the hiring of their building principal and 26 % for input into the appointment of instructional aides. Data culled from the focus group discussion reinforced the notions that some teams are reluctant to get involved in hiring and budgeting decisions. According to the districts, while some teams initially wanted to select personnel for their buildings, they experienced discomfort when the process of selection begun, especially in those instances when they had to make decisions about staff on their own level. These results parallel similar findings reported by Jones' (1997) study of teacher decision-making preferences in Texas. Jones found that teachers expressed a desire and were more involved in areas concerning curriculum/instruction and student services than staff personnel and budget management.

What tasks have most of the teams completed so far? At the time of the study, more than two-thirds of the teams reported that they had completed a review of their schools' academic performance and professional development plan, developed a technology plan, and had reviewed programs that were linked to cross content readiness skills in the Core Content Standards. About half of the teams had addressed curriculum alignment issues, while more than two-thirds of the teams had not yet dealt with issues related to school reward structures.

- **Model Selection Process and Rating of the Support Provided by the Model Developers**

One of the most important responsibilities assigned to the School Management Teams involves their role in assisting their schools to select and implement a whole school reform model. Because of this critical function, several questions regarding the model selection process, support from the model developers and satisfaction with the progress of implementing their reform model were asked of the teams. Their responses are summarized in Tables 6 and 7. With respect to choice of models, about 25% (or 18) of the Teams responding to the survey indicated that their schools had selected for their whole school reform model the Comer School Development Program. Twelve schools had Success for All, eleven (11) Coalition for Essential Schools, 7 Accelerated Learning and 5 Community for Learning. Twelve schools stated that they had selected another model. (Seven schools had not selected a model at the time of the study).

At least 44% of the teams felt that they were provided with substantial information about the models prior to making a choice. About a third felt that they were given some information and about 18% or 11 Teams felt that they were not given enough information on which they could base their decision. When asked to rate the adequacy of training received after the selection of their whole school reform model 62% of the Teams rated the training to be adequate or very adequate, 23% somewhat adequate and 15% inadequate.

Teams were asked to identify the factors that were most influential in affecting their choice of a whole school reform model. As can be seen from Table 6 the three most important factors were the congruency between the model and the school's needs, the information that was received and the model's flexibility. Teams were less influenced by the model's instructional focus, by visits to other sites or potential support from the model developers.

TABLE 6 Factors Influencing School Choice of a Whole School Reform Model	
Factor Influencing the Selection Process	**Percent of Teams Indicating its Importance**
Congruency of Model to School Needs	67%
Information provided on model	61%
Model's flexibility	57%
Model's Instructional Focus	43%
Site Visits	43%
Support of Model Developer	21%
Wishes of the Building Principal	20%
School already had model	13%

TABLE 7 SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES PROVIDED BY MODEL DEVELOPERS RELATIVE TO THE COST OF SUCH SERVICES	
Whole School Reform Model	**Percent Of Teams Reporting Satisfaction With The Services Provided By The Model Developer Relative To The Cost Of The Model**
Success for All	60%
Comer School Development Program	50%
Coalition for Essential Schools	25%
Accelerated Learning	20%
Community for Learning	0

About 50% of the Teams reported satisfaction with the model that their schools had adopted. However approximately 82% stated that if given a choice to select another model they would not do so. The models with the highest levels of dissatisfaction were Accelerated Learning and Community for Learning. Only one out of the seven teams that had selected Accelerated Learning was satisfied with their choice, and none of the five Teams in our sample that had selected Community for Learning indicated satisfaction with their choice. The quality of service provided by the model developers may be one contributory factor. Results of a chi square test of significant differences indicate that the services provided by the developers of the Comer and Success for All models were rated by the Teams to be significantly better overall than those provided by Accelerated Learning, Community for Learning and Coalition for Essential Schools.

Based on the cost of what they are paying the model developers, only 42% of the teams expressed satisfaction with the services, which they have received. There were great variations among the models in the degree to which, relative to cost, the Teams were satisfied with the services provided (See Table 7). Sixty percent of the Teams in Success for All Schools were satisfied with the services provided by the developers relative to the cost of adopting this model. In the case of the Comer Model, fifty percent of the Teams felt that the services were commensurate with the cost. Around 25% and 20% of the Teams belonging to Coalition of Essential Schools and Accelerated Learning Schools were satisfied. None of the Teams whose whole school reform model choice was Community for Learning was satisfied with the services that have been provided given the cost of the model.

Understanding the Process of Devolving Authority: The Central Office Perspective

The focus group discussion with central office personnel knowledgeable about the devolving of authority to the school management teams as well as discussions with school superintendents provide additional insights into the myriad of issues the districts are facing as the shift in the distribution of power and authority occurs. All the districts in the focus group prior to the Abbott rulings had begun to create opportunities for participatory decision- making in their systems. In some instances, these opportunities were more formally structured with the establishment of what is defined as school core teams. Thus, districts did not express aversion to the devolving of authority to the local sites and indeed endorsed the process as a means of creating structures that were more inclusive of the voices of their various constituents. However, the districts did provide comments on what they perceived as some of the salient issues that are currently affecting the effective implementation of SBM.

First, there was unanimity among the districts that the vagueness and lack of specificity in the state's regulations have led to confusion and misinterpretations on the part of the school management teams as to what their roles and responsibilities are. This they pointed out has been further aggravated by the ongoing changes to the guidelines, which occur annually. A second related concern dealt with the issues of competing power and authority in the areas of responsibility for school operations and curriculum. Prior to the most current form of the regulations there were no statements by the DOE clarifying the overall roles and responsibilities of the building principal. The new regulations now state that the building principal is the person in whom the supervisory and administrative responsibilities of the school reside.

However because of the lack of clarity in previous forms of the regulations some school management teams erroneously concluded that they were responsible for these functions. Also, as the districts pointed out, in those schools led by principals who failed to adequately fulfill these responsibilities, the school management teams emerged as centers of power. Districts alluded to situations where weak principals had abdicated their responsibilities to the Teams, and in so doing were sometimes unaware of the decisions made by the teams. The districts were however, equally concerned that principals by virtue of their positions not circumvent the decision-making processes that inhere in school-based management.

The importance of properly clarifying the role of the principal in decentralized structures cannot be overemphasized. According to Meadows (1990) one of the essential problems with some forms of school-based management is that the group makes the decision but the leader or principal alone is accountable. Thus clear articulation of the

principal's role vis a vis the team's operations is needed.

The research has demonstrated that principal leadership plays an important role in the successful devolution of authority. For example, Leithwood et.al (1999) found that principal leadership is quite central to teams that have the greatest influence on school practices. According to the Leithwood study, the principal's role is both symbolic and instrumental. Leithwood noted that school-based management tended to have a greater impact in schools in which principals facilitated the development of the teams, helped to focus the teams' activities on educationally substantive issues and engaged in a shared or distributive leadership role with the teams, than in schools in which the reverse was true. Within the context of the New Jersey model, in spite of the caveat that has been tagged onto the new regulations, the role of the principal as well as the central office has not been clearly defined and well articulated.

The second area of tension occurred over matters of curriculum. According to the regulations, the school management teams have considerable responsibilities for ensuring that the curriculum in their buildings as well as instruction are aligned to the core content standards. However as the districts noted, these curricular issues were previously addressed at the central office level in response to the state's adoption of the CCCS (which predated the most recent Abbott rulings). However, there was uncertainty among the teams about the relationship between the enacted curriculum based upon the district's aligned curricular frameworks on the one hand, and their responsibility for curriculum in their schools on the other. The confusion experienced by the teams with regards to their roles and responsibilities was perceived to be further compounded by the inability of the SRI teams to provide clear directions and meaningful guidance to the process.

As discussed earlier grave concerns about the effectiveness of the School Review and Improvement Teams have been expressed by not only the teams, but central office personnel and superintendents as well. Apart from the many issues, which we have previously mentioned, one additional extremely problematic area for the districts, which surfaced in the conversations with the superintendents, is the review of transfers by the SRIs. The guidelines state that any request for transfers must have the approval of the SRI teams. Superintendents complained that this process has not been working efficiently, and that the slow response of the SRI teams has created bottlenecks within their organizations. Superintendents noted that there were requests for transfers that have yet to be reviewed by their SRI teams.

Yet in spite of these difficulties, all the districts concurred that their school management teams have shown commitment and diligence in their efforts to develop quality implementation plans. Most of the districts indicated that their local teachers unions have been instrumental in helping the reform process. However, as the districts observed, the rushed timetables for decision-making, the inconsistencies and poor guidelines emanating from the DOE and the ineffectual role of the School Review and Improvement Teams have undermined the development of quality school management teams.

Policy Considerations

Most studies concur that restructuring requires all parts of the system to change at various levels, and simultaneously (Wohlstetter and Mohrman, 1996; Newman, 1991, 1993; David, 1991). Site based management and decentralized processes work only if a number of factors are addressed: first, traditional control by state departments of education and central office is transformed to provide technical and material

help; second, teachers are allowed to carry a larger share of instructional decision making responsibilities; third, unions agree to collaborate about the requisite needs for change; fourth schools are provided guidance and supports to build internal decision-making processes and fifth, clarification of the roles for various school constituencies is given.

The New Jersey experience speaks to both possibilities and disappointments. There exists through Abbott V an ambitious agenda for reform that includes changes in instructional programming through whole school reform models and accountability for student achievement. Although it is likely too early to expect outcomes based upon the newness of the New Jersey experiences, other institutional factors seem to have posed barriers. It is apparent from the beginning experiences of reform by school districts reported on in our study as well as previous studies, that implementation is often vague and uneven. The perceptions of direction and supports from the State are that they are often lacking and or misdirected. Thus, State regulation without "participatory input or partnership", has contributed additional layers of adversarial tension and control.

The findings in this study raise a number of policy concerns that must therefore be addressed if the reforms are to be successful. First, and most importantly for its implication for the future of the reforms, is the need to establish a formal collaborative arrangement between the State Department of Education and all the major players to include, the Abbott Superintendents, the Education Law Center and representative organizations such as NJEA, PSA, AFT and NJSBA. The purpose of this collaboration would be to foster a collective engagement in a review of the problems affecting implementation with a view towards arriving at logical policy solutions to these problems. That such a collaborative venture could work is underscored by the successful collaborative efforts that are currently occurring between the Abbott districts and Westat, the independent consulting firm that has been hired by the NJDOE to evaluate the early childhood component of the reforms.

Second, a thorough reconsideration and reconceptualization of the structure, roles and responsibilities of the School, Review and Improvement Teams must occur. The continued regulatory power that has been given to these teams appears unjustified and unwarranted given their lack of effectiveness. These Teams as we have noted, have contributed to some of the existing problems that are being experienced by the school management teams as well as the districts. It is strongly recommended, that their roles be redefined to focus solely on the provision of technical assistance and that they become the recipients of quality training before being sent out into the field. As one Superintendent noted, given the comprehensive nature of the reforms, viable SRI teams is crucial to success. Further, the State needs to rethink the consultative role of the SRI teams in decisions that pertain to transfers. Using an ineffective structure such as the current SRI Teams in critical decision making situations serves to hinder rather than forward not only the reform but also the daily operational imperatives of the districts.

Third, the roles and responsibilities of the school management teams need to be more circumscribed. The regulations as they now stand, give the teams a broad set of responsibilities that cover most of the processes inhering in teaching and learning as well as the management of their schools. However, as we have seen, not only do the teams lack the knowledge and experience to fulfill some of these tasks, but neither are they comfortable in carrying out some of these functions. Also the

rushed timetables for making decisions have made it difficult for the teams to engage in quality planning. Given these observations the question is how can the teams' time be used constructively and efficiently to bring about the improvements mandated by Abbott? We are suggesting that perhaps a narrowing in their responsibilities would be one way of achieving this.

In the same vein, there is a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of local school boards, the central office and the building principal.

Fourth, the work of the SMTs must extend beyond regular meetings if they are to successfully undertake their responsibilities. Subcommittee structure and training in key areas would serve to enhance expertise and advisory capacity essential for the support of team decision-making.

Fifth, there is a need to revisit the guidelines surrounding membership. Although the intent of the guidelines is to safeguard against the dominance of any one group in actuality the inability to secure representation from some constituent groups has partially resulted in a proportional imbalance in membership. In particular, there are many teams that lack community representation.

Sixth, the issue of compensation has to be more directly and pointedly addressed in the guidelines. Both the teams as well as district staff have indicated that this issue has evoked some controversy among teams, especially in contexts in which no preexisting negotiated agreement exists. This is certainly one area that could be the subject for discussion if not possible resolution among the collaborative group, which we propose, should be constituted.

Seventh, the State has to assume more direct responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of services rendered by the model developers. The results from the survey indicate that several teams were dissatisfied with the services received from some of the model developers. Neither has the SRI teams provided assistance to the school management teams in their working with these various developers. Schools are therefore left in the position of paying for services that they feel are not commensurate with the cost. The Department of Education needs to structure a communication mechanism through which it can receive from districts legitimate concerns about the developers. (Parenthetically, this mechanism ought to be independent of the current SRI, which has yet to prove itself as being successful). If the Department of Education finds that in fact, the model developers are providing inadequate services then it needs to develop some policy on how it intends to deal with those developers whose services are substandard.

Eighth, while schools in the Abbott districts are seen as the strategic sites where local decisions regarding the implementation of the reforms are to occur, in reality there is a re-intensification and consolidation of power at the state level, which undermines genuine autonomy and which results in the schools and their districts having only limited discretion over the reform. Thus, there is an apparent contradiction in the policy governing whole school reform through participatory decision- making. This is borne out not only by the data provided in this study, but the continuous challenges that have been made to the manner in which the Department of Education has reacted to decisions made at the local site (See Walker and Gutmore, 2000). It therefore seems imperative that an analysis and clarification of the role and responsibilities of the Department of Education ought to occur. If there is a genuine commitment to the devolution of decision-making to the schools devoid of increasing centralism at the State level, then what is the proper role and function of the NJDOE in support of this?

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